

INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE

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I. Preliminary Considerations

1. The importance of a careful study of the Bible, making use of every accessible help, is seen in the fact of its:
 - a. Composite authorship.
 - b. Dates of composition.
 - c. Various places of composition.
 - d. Use of oriental expressions, allusions, figures.
 - e. Variety of subject matter.
 - f. Divided interest, sometimes Israel, sometimes the Gentiles.
 - g. Religious and spiritual character.
2. The mental and spiritual prerequisites
 - a. The exercise of a humble and devout mind; the habit of earnest and reverential attention to all the Bible reveals; the seeking of that inward teaching of the Holy Spirit. To understand true poetry there must be a poetic taste. So with the Bible. There must be the alert intellect; also “the heart that watches and receives” (Eph. 1:17; John 7:17).
 - b. A child-like docility, an obedient heart, a dependent and prayerful temper, are essential to the successful study of the Bible.

II. Rules of Interpretation

1. Interpret grammatically, with due regard to the meaning of words, the form of sentences, and the peculiarities of idiom.
2. The meaning of the word is determined:
 - a. By its Scripture usage.
 - b. By its commonly accepted meaning.

- c. By what the writer's obvious meaning is and what the persons addressed understood him to mean.
3. The true meaning of any passage of Scripture is not every sense which the words will bear, nor every sense which is true in itself, but that which is intended by the writer.

III. Peculiarities of Idiom: Hebrew

1. The expression of a qualifying thought by the use, not of an adjective, but of a second noun: 1 Thess. 1:3, "Your believing work," etc.; Eph. 1:13, "the promised Spirit."
2. Calling a person having a peculiar quality, or subject to a peculiar evil, the child or son of that quality (1 Sam. 2:12, "Belial," namely, "worthless"; Luke 10:6, Eph. 5:6, 8, disobedient and enlightened persons).
3. To express preference for one person to another the Hebrew idiom use "to love and to hate" (Luke 14:26; Matt. 10:37; Rom. 9:13).
4. Plural nouns are sometimes used in Hebrew to imply that there are more than one, though it may be to one only that reference is made (Gen. 8:4; Mark 13:1, 2; Matt. 26:8; John 12:4, 13:4; Mark 5:27, 30).
5. The names of parents, or ancestors, are often used for their posterity (Gen. 9:25, "Cursed be Canaan's posterity"; "Jacob" and "Israel" often refer to the Israelites, Gen. 49:7; Ps. 14:7).
6. The word "son" is used in general for a descendant (2 Sam. 19:24); "father" used for any ancestor (Dan. 5:18).
7. Some numeral expressions in frequent use denote indefinite numbers: "Ten" means "several," as well as that precise number (Gen. 31:7); "forty" means "many" (2 Kings 8:9); "seven" and "seventy" often express a large and complete, though uncertain, number (Ps. 119:164; Matt. 18:21, 22).

8. The Bible sometimes uses a round number, rather than a more exact specification (Num. 25:9).
9. Sometimes verbs denoting being or action are used, when the declaration is only intended that the thing is true, or is so done (Lev. 13:3, 34, “pronounce” in Hebrew, lit., “to make”; 2 Cor. 3:6, “the letter killeth,” that is, declares death as a consequence of sin).
10. Different persons have often the same name; Pharoah was the general name of the kings of Egypt until Alexander the Great, when they were called Ptolemy; Agag was the name of the Kings of the Amalekites; Augustus Caesar was the name of the Roman emperors, Tiberius ruling at the time of the crucifixion and Nero, at Paul’s time.
11. Different names were given to the same person; as Levi and Matthew, Thomas and Didymus, Silvanus and Silas.
12. Different places often have the same name: Antioch in Syria, Antioch in Pisidia.
13. Different names are given to the same places: Lake of Gennesareth, Sea of Chennireth, Sea of Galilee, Sea of Tiberias, all refer to the one body of water.
14. Sometimes the same name is applied to a person and to a place: Magog, the name of a son of Japheth, is also the name of the country occupied by the people of God (Ezek. 38:1; Rev. 20:8).
15. The names of both persons and places are sometimes spelled differently in the original because of similarity of some letters, which resulted in transcriptional errors. Nebuchadnezzar is also Nebuchadrezzar; Uzziah is Azariah; Peniel is Penuel; Jether is Jethro.

IV. Contextual Explanation

1. The immediate context
 - a. A word is frequently defined in the context in which it is found.
 - (1) “Faith” is defined in Hebrews 11:1-3; illustrated in 11:4-40.

- (2) “Perfection” in Psalm 37:37 is synonymous with “uprightness” in Hebrews 5:14; refers to the possession of clear and accurate knowledge of the truth in James 1:4; refers to that spiritual condition when the Christian is “entire, wanting nothing.”
- (3) “Mystery” in Ephesians 3:4, 5 is defined by example, as the truth that the Gentiles should be partakers of the promise in Christ by the Gospel.
- (4) “World” in John 3:16 refers to one thing; in 1 John 2:15, to another.
- b. Explanation by analogy or antithesis. Sometimes where there is no formal definition, the meaning is made clear by the use of some analogous or similar expression, or by antithesis.
- (1) In Galatians 3:15-17 the covenant is explained as a promise. See also Colossians 2:7; Romans 4:5.
- (2) In Romans 6:23 the meaning of the word “death” is gathered from the opposite, “eternal life.”
- c. Parallelism is a guide to meaning, as in the case of Hebrew poetry (Ps. 112:1).
- d. The general reasoning or allusions in the context often determine and sometimes limit the meaning of a word.
- (1) The term “righteous” is sometimes used in a limited sense of wicked persons, as in the case of Ishbosheth (2 Sam. 4:11), merely implying that he had done no injury to his murderers. See also John 9:3 and James 5:16.
- (2) The context may require that a word be understood in the very opposite of its natural sense, as in 1 Kings 22:15, where the prophet speaks ironically, and means the reverse.
- e. Parentheses are often indicated by the use of “for” (Rom. 2:11-16; 2 Cor. 6:2; Eph. 2:14-18). The word “therefore” often resumes the argument interrupted by a parenthesis (Eph. 3:2—4:1; Phil. 3:2-14).
- f. Connection of thought may be somewhat obscured by the use of a covert dialogue (Rom. 3:1-8).

2. A Wider Context

Note: Where the immediate context does not throw sufficient light upon a word, the following may be studied:

- a. The purpose for which the book was written (Gal. 5:4; 1:6, 2:16; 3:3, 13, 19).
- b. The historical background of the book (Heb. 6:6; 10:11, 12, 23, 38, 39).
- c. The express mention of the scope of a section or book (Rom. 3:28; Eph. 2:11-13; 4:1-3; Luke 1:1-4; John 20:31).

V. **The Comparison of Scripture with Scripture**

1. The comparison of the words of Scripture with one another.

- a. David, “a man after God’s own heart” (1 Sam. 13:14), was so primarily in the discharge of his duties as king (1 Sam. 2:35).
- b. “Putting on Christ” (Gal. 3:27) is explained by Romans 13:14 and Colossians 3:10.
- c. “Made a calf in Horeb” (Ps. 106:19), in the very place where Israel had pledged themselves to renounce all idolatry (Exodus 32).

2. The rule for considering verbal parallelisms is to ascertain the sense in which the word is used by the writer in other places, then in other writings of the same period, then throughout the Bible.

- a. Compare “works” of Romans and Galatians with “works” of James (Rom. 4:1-5; James 2:21, 22).
- b. Compare “word” of John 1:1 and 2 Timothy 4:2.

3. Sometimes appeal must be made to facts or doctrines. By comparing Matthew 26:27 with 1 Corinthians 11:28 we find that each believer is to partake of the cup.

4. Ideas expressed briefly or obscurely are more clearly understood by consulting passages where they are more fully explained (Phil. 3:9 explained in Rom. 3:21—5:11; 1 Pet. 4:8 in Prov. 10:12).
5. Many passages are to be explained by reference to the general tenor of Scripture.
 - a. Passages which seem to represent God as material, local, or limited of His omnipresence, omniscience, and omnipotence (Rev. 4:2; Gen. 6:6; Ps. 2:4).
 - b. If freedom from obligation to obedience be preached in connection with justification by faith, such teaching must be rejected because it violates the spirit of the gospel [(Rom. 6:1)].

VI. The Interpretation of the Figurative Language of Scripture

1. The need for figurative language in the Bible is found in the fact that “it is a necessity of the human intellect that facts connected with the mind, or with spiritual truth, must be clothed in language borrowed from material things.”
2. Figurative language is essentially true. “The figures which are used in speaking of spiritual truth are not used, as in common description, to give an unnatural greatness or dignity to the objects they describe. The things represented have much more of reality and perfection in them than the things by which we represent them. The figurative language then, which we are compelled to employ when speaking of spiritual things, is much within the truth, and never beyond it.”
3. The same figurative expression may have different meanings, in different contexts. “Repent” in Genesis 6:6 means that God changes His dealings with sinners when they change. “Repent” in Numbers 23:19 means that there is no fickleness in Him. Compare Psalm 18:11 with 1 Timothy 6:16; Exodus 33:11 with Exodus 33:20.
4. Figures are taken sometimes from historical facts. The idea of holiness, for which in its Christian sense the heathen have no word, was pictured in the Levitical ritual, requiring a clean animal for sacrifice and a peculiar tribe to present the sacrifice, the washing of the latter and the ablution of the priest, together with the offering burnt without the holy place. The idea of the infinite purity of God was thus suggested.

5. Figures as classified by grammarians are as follows:
- a. When a word which usage has appropriated to one thing is transferred to another, then there is a trope or figure, and the expression is tropical or figurative. If, however, the first meaning of a word is no longer used, the tropical sense becomes the proper one. The Hebrew word “to bless” meant originally “to bend the knee,” but it is not used in Scripture in that sense, and therefore “to bless” is said to be the proper and not the figurative meaning.
 - b. When there is a resemblance between the two things to which a word is applied, the figure is called a metaphor (Gen. 49:9; John 15:1).
 - c. Where there is no resemblance, but only a connection between them, the figure is called a synecdoche, as in 1 Corinthians 11:27; where the cup is used for what it contains.
 - d. When the connection is not visible, or is formed in the mind – as when the cause is put for the effects (see John 13:8, where “wash” means “to purify or cleanse”), or where the sign is put for the thing signified (see 1 Pet. 3:21, where “baptism” is explained by “the appeal”), etc. – we have the figure called metonymy.
 - e. Any statement of supposed facts which admits of a literal interpretation, and yet requires or justly admits a moral or figurative one, is called an allegory, either a pure one, namely, where no direct reference to the application is made (Luke 15:11-32), or mixed (Ps. 80:17).
 - f. When the allegory is written in the style of history, and is confined to occurrences that may have taken place, it is called a parable (Matt. 13).
 - g. As an allegory is a double representation in words, in like manner, a type is a double representation in action, the literal representing the spiritual.
 - h. A symbol is an outward representation of spiritual truth. The type is prefigurative, the symbol illustrative of what already exists; examples: baptism, the bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper.
6. Figurative language is explained by the context (Hos. 4:12, 13; John 6:47, 57; Matt. 26:28, 29; 1 Cor. 5:8; Matt. 16:6, 12).

7. Allegories and their interpretation

- a. A symbol wrought out into details, especially where it partakes of a narrative character, passes into allegory (Gen. 49:9). More extended allegories are, Isaiah 5:1-7; Psalm 80:8-19; Ezekiel 17:3-10, etc. The Book of Revelation is a series of allegories.
- b. The great rule of interpretation is to ascertain the scope of an allegory either by reference to the context, or to parallel passages; and to seize the main truth which it is intended to set forth, interpreting all accessories in harmony with the central truth.

8. Scripture types

- a. The word "type" is from a Greek word meaning "a stamp" or "impress," and is rendered "figure," "pattern," "ensample." It is our word "copy" referring to the imitation made or that which is to be imitated. "Antitype," literally, "answering to the type," is either the reality or the imperfect shadow.
- b. The following points are to be especially noted:
 - (1) That which is symbolized, the antitype, is the ideal or spiritual reality, corresponding to the type and transcending it.
 - (2) The type may have its own place and meaning, independent of that which it prefigures; example: the brazen serpent. The type may at the time, therefore, have been unapprehended in its highest character.
 - (3) With regard to symbols, generally, the essence of a type must be distinguished from its accessories.
 - (4) The only secure authority for the application of a type is to be found in Scripture; the mere perception of analogy will not suffice. "To constitute one thing the type of another, as the term is generally understood in reference to Scripture, something more is wanted than mere resemblance. The former must not only resemble the latter, but must have been designed to resemble the latter. It must have been so designated in its original institution. It must have been designed as preparatory to the latter. The type, as well as the antitype, must have been preordained, and they must have been preordained as constituent parts of the same general scheme of

divine Providence. It is this previous design and this preordained connection which constitute the relation of type and antitype” (Rom. 2:28; 1 Cor. 10; Heb. 4:1; 1 Pet. 2:5; Rev. 15:5; Gal. 4:25; Acts 13:34; Heb. 10:1). A type may be a person (Rom. 5:14), an event (1 Cor. 10:11), a thing (Heb. 10:20), an institution (Heb. 5:6), a ceremonial (1 Cor. 5:7).

(5) When comparing the history or type with the general truth, which both the type and the antitype embody, expect agreement in several particulars but not in all, and let the interpretation of each part harmonize with the design of the whole, and with the clear revelation of divine doctrine given in other parts of the Bible.

(6) The Bible writers:

(a) Did not destroy the historical sense of Scripture to establish the spiritual.

(b) Did not find a hidden meaning in the words but only in the facts of each passage, which meaning is easy, natural and scriptural.

(c) Confined themselves to expositions illustrating some truth of practical or spiritual importance.

9. Parables and their interpretation.

a. A parable is a narrative constructed for the sake of conveying important truth. Sometimes, as in Matthew 15:14, 15, the word is used synonymously with the word “proverb.”

b. The parable differs from the allegory in that whereas the latter personifies attributes and qualities themselves, the personages of the former illustrate these in their words and conduct.

c. The parable differs from the fable (Judg. 9:8-15; 2 Kings 14:9) in that the former limits its scope to the human and possible.

d. Our Lord’s use of parables.

(1) They illuminated His teaching by a contact with common life and human interests.

(2) They tested the disposition of His hearers (Matt. 21:45, 46; Luke 20:19).

e. The rules of interpretation:

(1) Ascertain what is the scope, by reference to the context, or to parallel passages; and seize the one truth which the parable is intended to set forth, distinguishing it from all other truths which border upon it, and let the parts of the parable that are explained be explained in harmony with this one truth. The scope is given in the context (Matt. 22:14, Luke 18:1), or at the beginning of the parable (Luke 18:9; 19:11), or at its close (Matt. 25:13; Luke 16:9), or at both (Matt. 18:21, 35; Luke 12:15, 21), or in a parallel passage (Luke 15:4-7; Matt. 21:12-17). Any interpretation of a parable or allegory that is inconsistent with the great truth which it is thus seen to involve, must be rejected.

(2) No conclusion must be gathered from any part of a parable or type which is in its doctrine inconsistent with the clear revelation of Scripture. For instance, if someone in interpreting the parables of the prodigal son or that of the faithful servants asserts that God saves us apart from the substitutionary atonement, we must reject such an interpretation as being inconsistent with what Scripture clearly reveals (Heb. 9:22).

(3) Parables should not be made the first or sole source of Scripture doctrine. They may, however, be used to illustrate or confirm doctrine.

10. Prophecy and its interpretation

a. The Greek word “prophet” means “one who speaks forth a message,” and represents in Scripture a Hebrew word which means “spokesman.” A prophet is a spokesman for another who speaks forth a message for him. The message may concern the times in which he is living or be a prediction of future events. The chief and basic function of the prophet was that of a preacher of righteousness, dealing with the spiritual conditions of his day. This latter is the key to the interpretation of their prophecies.

b. Prophecy as historical

- (1) The books of the prophets are collections of sermons preached as occasion demanded.
- (2) To interpret correctly a prophet's writings, the student must understand the history of the writer and his times. 2 Kings 14-21 furnishes the historical background for the prophecy of Isaiah, for instance.

c. Prophecy as predictive

- (1) In dealing with the predictive element, the student must keep in mind that often there is a partial fulfillment that leaves unexplained and unexhausted types and predictions which are finally fulfilled in the Messianic person and kingdom of our Lord.
- (2) Thus, much in prophecy has a primary and also an ultimate reference.
- (3) Illustrations are Joel 2:28-32, partially fulfilled in Acts 2:14-21, finally fulfilled at the second advent (Zech. 12:10, and context of chapters 12-14). The double application is restricted to similar events under two different events under the same economy.
- (4) Imagery and symbol are used in prophecy. Zechariah 14:16 declares that all nations will worship God. The prosperous times of David and Solomon (1 Kings 4:25) are predictive of Messiah's glorious reign. The enemies of Messiah's kingdom are sometimes collectively called by the name of some peculiarly powerful nation (Isa. 25:10; 63:1).

d. Peculiarities in prophetic language.

- (1) The prophets often speak of things that belong to the future as if present to their view (Isa. 9:6).
- (2) They speak of things future as past (Isa. 53).
- (3) When the precise time of individual events was not revealed, the prophets describe them as continuous. They saw the future rather in space than in time; the whole therefore appears foreshortened and perspective, rather than actual distance, is regarded (Dan. 2:36-45; 7:1-14; Isa. 61:2; Zech. 9:9, 10).

- e. The great principle of interpretation is found in 2 Peter 1:20, 21. No prophecy is to be explained without the guiding, restricting, defining limitations which other prophecy imposes upon it. The prophecy must not be lifted out of its related setting and an arbitrary interpretation placed upon it.

11. Old Testament quotations and references in the New Testament.

- a. There are 263 quotations, 52 of which are in Romans, 37 in Matthew, 33 in Hebrews, and 31 in Acts, with varying lesser quantities in the other books.
- b. There are 376 references, 115 of which are in the Revelation, 44 in Hebrews, 43 in Matthew, and 31 in Luke, with lesser quantities in the other books.
- c. Quotations from the Pentateuch number 90 and references to it about 100; from the Psalms, 71 quotations, 30 references; from Isaiah, 56 quotations, 48 references.
- d. The formulas of quotations are most generally, “that it might be fulfilled,” “it is (or has been) written,” “the scripture saith.”
- e. The quotations are classified as:
 - (1) Prophetic, either as immediately (Matt. 4:15, 16) or typically, indicating primarily some typical event or person, and then some other event or person (John 19:36);
 - (2) Demonstrative, proving some statement (John 6:45)
 - (3) Explanatory, explaining some statement or fact (Heb. 12:20)
 - (4) Illustrative, when expressions are taken from the Old Testament with a new meaning (Rom. 10:18)
- f. As to the sources, the quotations are generally from the LXX; sometimes from the Hebrew, these varying more or less from the LXX; and still more frequently they express the general sense without verbal exactness. Sometimes they are strict and verbal; sometimes widely paraphrastic or greatly abbreviated. They are usually quotations from memory, as shown, among other indications, by the varying uses of the divine names, “God” and “Lord” (Jehovah). For a paraphrastic quotation see Mathew 13:35 and Psalm 78:2; for

an abbreviated one, Matthew 22:24 and Deuteronomy 25:5. Quotations are sometimes combined (Mark 1:2, 3; Mal. 3:1, and Isa. 40:3). The omission by Satan in Matthew 4:6 and Luke 4:10, when quoting Psalm 91:11, is significant.

- g. As to variations between the New Testament and the Old, they are generally explained on the principle that it is rather the sense than the words that are quoted. Yet at times there is an obvious purpose in the variation, for instance:
- (1) To fit a quotation to the context, the number, person, tense, or voice of the verb is changed (Luke 4:12 and Deut. 6:16; Luke 8:10 and Isa. 6:9; John 19:36 and Exod. 12:46).
 - (2) To suit the argument, or to suggest an additional lesson, the meaning of the Hebrew is narrowed in the quotation, the large meaning including the Lesser. In Hebrews 1:6 we have “angels” instead of “gods” as in Psalm 97:7. The original means “mighty ones” and is applied to God, false gods, angels, and generally to those high in authority. The writer takes the narrower meaning and omits the rest. In 1 Corinthians 3:20, quoted from Psalm 94:11, for “men” Paul reads “wise”; in Matthew 4:10 our Lord says “worship,” instead of “fear” as in Deuteronomy 6:13; and in Romans 14:11 Paul uses “confess” for “swear” as in Isaiah 45:23.
- h. Synonymous expressions are frequently employed. Psalm 16:9 uses in Hebrew “my glory”; the LXX and New Testament, “my tongue.” Isaiah 11:10 has, “shall stand for an ensign”; the LXX and Romans 15:12, “shall arise to rule.”
- i. Sometimes part of a prediction is omitted because not required by the argument, or because likely to raise a question which the inspired writer did not at the time intend to discuss. In quoting Zechariah 9:9, Matthew 21:5 omits “having salvation,” as that fact was not apparent at the time.
- j. Sometimes there are important variations in which the LXX and New Testament materially differ from the Hebrew, while substantially expressing the same thought. In Psalm 51:4 we have “when thou judgest,” and in Romans 3:4 it is “when thou comest into judgments,” R.V. and LXX; that is, God’s judgments, rightly estimated, are proved to be just, one truth in two different aspects. Compare Isaiah 53:8, R.V., “By oppression and judgment he was taken away,” with Acts 8:33. The Hebrew speaks of iniquitous judgment

inflicted; the LXX and New Testament of just judgment denied, two aspects of the same fact.

k. There are untraced quotations.

(1) Matthew 2:23, "A Nazarene," appears to be a general reference to those passages which speak of His humiliation.

(2) John 7:38 is a general reference to Old Testament imagery (Isa. 44:3; 55:1; 58:11).

(3) Ephesians 5:14 was probably based upon Isaiah 60:1, with Paul's commentary.

(4) James 4:5 has the same thought as Exodus 20:5, but there is no direct quotation.

l. Bearing of quotations upon doctrine is as follows: They illustrate the doctrines and ethics, supply evidence of the truth of Scripture, and suggest important rules of biblical interpretation.

(1) They prove that salvation is by faith and through Christ (Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:6-9, 14, 16; Rom. 4:10, 11; 1 Pet. 2:6, 7; John 8:56).

(2) The fact that men are condemned through unbelief is illustrated (Heb. 3:7-10).

(3) Holiness is essential, consists of love, and is enforced by divine example (2 Cor. 6:16; Matt. 22:37-39; 1 Pet. 1:16; Matt. 23:23).

(4) Quotations which in the Old Testament refer to Jehovah, are referred to the Lord Jesus in the New Testament (Isa. 8:13, 14; Rom. 9:22, 23; 10:11; Isa. 45:21-25; Rom. 14:11; Heb. 3:6, 7).

(5) The principle involved in Old Testament history may be applied to the experience of the Church under the gospel (Rom. 9:7, 9; 8:36; 1 Cor. 10:1-11; Heb. 3:7-10; 10:26-30). This resemblance between Old Testament history and New Testament experience is not merely by way of illustration. It was predetermined (1 Cor. 10:6). The formula, "That it might be fulfilled," does not mean that the events were brought to pass

simply to fulfill prophecy, but that they occurred to fulfill a divine purpose (Hos. 11:1; Matt. 2:15; 2 Cor. 6:17, 18; Isa. 52:11, 12).

(6) Double fulfillments are explained as follows:

- (a) Sometimes the persons or things are types, one of the other (Deut. 1:10; Rom. 4:18; Exod. 12:46; John 19:36).
- (b) Sometimes they are, in certain aspects, identical (Gal. 3:16, 29).
- (c) Sometimes the events referred to are so closely blended as to be scarcely distinguishable (Isa. 40:3-5).

12. Scripture difficulties.

- a. Difficulties are to be expected in the Bible because of the disuse of the two languages in which it was written; expressions belonging to the Orient, to different ages, countries, and persons; its variety and comprehensiveness of topics, manners and customs that have passed away; its references to two worlds, the seen and the unseen, the present, past, and future; its bridging of the gap between the infinite and the finite, all this within the compass of one book.
- b. Many difficulties do not really exist, but can be cleared up by a better knowledge of the original text, by the correction of inaccurate translation, or by an acquaintance with the manners and customs of the age and country in which the book was written.
- c. Apparently contradictory narratives may record different facts. In Matthew 1:1-16 we have our Lord's genealogy through Joseph in the royal line; in Luke 3:23-38, His genealogy through Mary in the natural descent. The call of the first apostles in Matthew 4:18-22 and Luke 5:1-11 are different accounts of the same transaction, and are both different in place and subsequent in time to the call to discipleship (John 1:35-42). The Lord's prayer was perhaps given to the multitude upon the mountain (Matt. 6:9-15), and to the disciples alone (Luke 11:2-4).
- d. In giving the same narrative, different historians relate different circumstances, some giving more, some fewer than the rest; the fuller account includes the shorter, and the shorter does not contradict the fuller. Compare

Luke 2:39 with Matthew 2:19-23; Mark 5:1-21, and Matthew 8:28-34 and Luke 8:26-40; Matthew 20:30-34 and Mark 10:46-52 and Luke 18:35-43.

- e. In reporting the same words of another, one historian may give the exact words, another, the sense, or each a different part of what was said, or they might vary the order for a particular reason (cf. Matt. 5—7, and Luke 6:17-49; cf. Matt. 26:26, 27; Mark 14:22-25, and Luke 22:19, 30; cf. Matt. 27:37; Mark 15:26; Luke 23:38, and John 19:19).
- f. Things said to be done by one man are elsewhere said to be done by another (Matt. 8:5, 6; Luke 7:2, 3; Mark 10:35; Matt. 20:20) who, however, acted on his behalf. Sometimes the plural is used when the remark is applicable to one only (Matt. 26:8 and John 12:4; Matt. 27:44 and Luke 23:39-42).
- g. Narratives of what was spoken or done may create difficulty from the fact that general expressions are to be limited by particular ones, obscure expressions to be explained by those that are plain (Matt. 10:10; Mark 6:8; Luke 9:3).
- h. The narratives of Scripture are compiled on different principles and for different purposes. Some are written chronologically, on the whole or in particular passages; others give incidents in groups. The principle arrangement must be studied, and the whole harmonized in accordance with it.
 - (1) The order of Mark and Luke is generally chronological.
 - (2) Matthew gives facts and parables in groups. Sometimes Matthew gives the true order, and indicates the fact by the terms employed. In the history of the temptation (4:3-10), he affirms the order; “then,” “again”; while Luke (ch. 4) gives a different order, but the order is not affirmed.
- i. Sometimes the reference contains more than the original narrative, and the difficulty is removed by remembering that the earlier inspired historians did not relate all that happened (Ps. 105:18; Acts 20:35; 1 Cor. 15:7).
- j. Sometimes general assertions in one text are to be restricted by others (Luke 16:18; Mark 10:11, 12; Matt. 5:32; 19:9; 1 Cor. 7:15).
- k. Sometimes the same terms are used in different senses in different texts, and it is difficult to know how to restrict them in each.

- (1) In the case of Matthew 18:21, 22 and Luke 17:3, 4, either the condition of repentance is presupposed in Matthew or the phrase in Luke means “as often as one seeks forgiveness, give it.”
- (2) Comparing Romans 3:28 and James 2:24, we find that Paul speaks of justification in the sight of God, James of justification in the sight of man.

VII. The Conclusion

In the case of difficulties that still remain unsolved, these do not impair the evidence of the divine inspiration of the Scriptures or their trustworthiness or their credibility when we take the following facts into consideration:

1. In passages innumerable and unmistakable, the Bible reveals the essential principles of truth and duty.
2. Natural religion, revealed religion, and the providence of God, together with every known law of human duty, are all exposed to the same difficulties. There is in all an obscurity of meaning and deficiency of evidence, a mysteriousness or arrangement and treatment that bespeak our state to be one of incessant discipline.
3. The gradual solution of Bible difficulties during the ages has been both an incentive and confirmation of our belief in an infallible and inspired revelation.
4. The absence of difficulty in a communication from what professed to be infinite wisdom would be a strong indication of its human origin, whereas in a revelation from God we would expect that our finite minds would find things which we could not fully comprehend or reconcile.
5. The preceding being the case, four general rules of interpretation with regard to difficulties have been formulated.
 - a. We must interpret Scripture in accordance with that which it professes to be, an inspired volume designed to set forth the scheme of salvation by Christ, and to bring men to God.
 - b. Scripture must be regarded as a system from beginning to end, and the different books and sentences must be interpreted as the component and connected parts of a great whole.

- c. Scripture passages must be studied in the light of their vital and logical connection with their immediate context and their historical background.
- d. We must not expect the explanation of every difficulty.

Note: This material is based upon pages 176-275 in Angus-Green “Handbook to the Scriptures,” which can be consulted for further details.